Vanity

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by lakesinstillness

Summary

Hannibal wished to express his love for Will by worshipping him, turning him into an idol.

But Hannibal's actions changed when his idol finally spoke back to him.

Notes

I know the quote the fic is inspired by was about misogyny, but I'm shitty and turned it into a fic idea. So here that idea is. Hope you like it!

This fic also takes partial inspiration from my bestie direngrey's fic, Encouraged Blackouts. It's also about Hannigram and super good, please read it!

- Inspired by Excerpt from Ways of Seeing by John Berger

Hannibal didn't know at what point he fell in love with Will. There really was no one single point; a feeling like that could only be formed moment by moment, and even then it was ever-changing. No, Hannibal never fell in love with Will, he was always in the process of *falling* in love with him, his feelings too dynamic to ever be complete. Just as a physicist's understanding of a particle remains limited by the uncertainty principle, Hannibal's love for Will could never be fully understood.

There was only one way to honor a love like that. A fluid, almost paradoxical love like the one Hannibal had for Will. To honor that love, venerate it as if it were God itself. God, who in His very nature is complex and contradictory. That is the only being Hannibal's love for Will could be compared to.

~

Hannibal found his way into Will's mind, figured out exactly how to control him. During their sessions, he would bring him into a hypnotic state, barely aware of anything at all. Will's memories from outside of these sessions and within them remained separated by a wall, though Hannibal himself didn't know how much information traveled between that wall. All he knew is Will didn't seem to know who he was, or anything for that matter, when in these sessions, and didn't seem to remember the sessions when he was out of it. And Hannibal wanted to keep it this way. This Will, the hypnotized Will of Hannibal's sessions, was to remain a secret, even to himself. He was Hannibal's Dorian Gray, only this one would remain uncorrupted eternally, only existing in Hannibal's memory and deep within Will's subconscious, with no exposure to anyone or anything that could corrupt it.

During these sessions, Hannibal would venerate Will. Adorn him with the most valuable things he could find: makeup, applied like paint to a canvas; perfumes from around the world, aromas that appealed to Hannibal's most refined sense; clothing that enhanced Will's body, yet could not compare to it on its own. Hannibal beautified Will, transformed him into a higher being, meant to be worshiped.

And then he did just that. Once his work was finished, Hannibal brought Will to the mirror and explained exactly what he did, exactly where everything came from and how it was made. Not that Will was aware enough to even comprehend any of it.

Then Hannibal undressed Will, laid him in bed, and worshiped him. He kissed Will all over, only stopping to affirm his divinity. Tasting the idol he created, feeding off of it, all while paying it the respect it deserved. Starting at the feet, the lowest part, and then moving upward, allowing their hands to embrace as he laid his lips and tongue all across Will's chest. Whispering more praises of Will's beauty in his ear as he caressed Will's face with the palm

of his hand. Will's eyes were open but he did not say a word. Like God, who did not answer the prayers of His faithful.

Once Hannibal was done with the front, he turned Will on his stomach so he could worship the back, moving downward this time. He planted kisses all over Will's spine, resisting the urge to mark him. Hannibal honored every part of Will, which meant his ass was no exception. Hannibal's tongue ran circles around his hole, and that was the one time Will seemed to have any sort of reaction to anything. His breath changed in pace and intensity as Hannibal rimmed him. But even then he did not move an inch. Like a doll, stuck watching Hannibal play with him but never engaging in return.

When Hannibal finished his worship, he cleaned Will, washing away the makeup and at any places where a lot of his saliva was left. He then dressed Will in the clothes he was wearing before the session and brought him back to his normal state. Will, of course, did not remember a thing. He likely would never know how Hannibal expressed his love for him, nor would anyone else.

~

During one session, Hannibal dressed Will as usual. Then he brought Will before the mirror, and went on his usual explanation of how he chose to adorn him. But once he was finished, instead of the usual praises he asked Will a question.

"Do you even know who you are anymore?" Hannibal whispered. Not expecting an answer, of course; it was more of an observation, a recognition of how unaware Will was in this state.

But Will *did* answer. "I am beautiful."

As simple as they were, those three words changed everything. Hannibal's prayers were meant to remain unanswered, and here Will was, answering them. Hannibal's doll was not to engage in response to its owner's play, yet here it was, engaging.

And the worst part of it was Will's ego, the pure focus on himself. The phrase "I am" subtly framing Will as *immutably* beautiful, as if Hannibal did not need to put all that effort into making him so.

Hannibal's Dorian Gray had become corrupted, not from some outside force but rather by Will himself. He was angry at what his creation had become, but knew it was too late to change it now. It was an inescapable reality that once the painting became complete, the painter could no longer speak through it. Once the painter's work was done, the painting had to speak for itself.

Which meant Hannibal had no choice but to destroy it.

“No, you’re wrong,” Hannibal spoke, his nails digging into Will’s shoulders. “You are Vanity.”

After Hannibal’s correction, he tore off his creation’s clothes before bringing it to the bed and forcing it to lie on its stomach. He began his destruction by beating Will, spanking his ass until he could see his hand imprinted into it. He then laid the same kisses on his back, only now he gave into his temptation, sucking each spot until they bruised.

When Hannibal turned Will to lay on his back, he didn’t bother with the rest of Will’s body, instead focusing on his face. Will still had not moved an inch nor said a word, but he had shed quite a few tears, causing his makeup to run. That didn’t grant him mercy, though, and Hannibal began slapping him, holding his face still by gripping his hair. Any breaks Hannibal took were spent spitting on him. His slaps eventually turned into punches as he watched Will’s face bruise and swell.

Hannibal had successfully destroyed his creation. The same places Hannibal once planted gentle kisses were now littered with bruises. The face Hannibal once adored was now difficult to look at. The adornments were all destroyed: clothing torn, makeup ruined, perfume masked by the odor of Will’s sweat. Hannibal couldn’t help but think about God at that moment. The very being that had created such beautiful bodies created them so that they could be bruised, broken. And, in turn, the hand that had beautified Will was the very same hand that had bruised him, broken him.

Finished with his destruction, Hannibal brought Will back to the mirror. Though the man was aware enough to cry while he was being hurt, he didn’t seem to recognize what had happened to him. Though maybe he didn’t recognize himself at all.

“You *were* beautiful,” Hannibal explained, caressing Will's cheek with the back of his hand. “And now you are nothing.”

~

Given all that Hannibal put Will through, he couldn’t just awaken Will right then. He left Will in that state and went to his house, fed his dogs, and fetched a new outfit for him. He tore and dirtied it before dressing Will in it. He would need to wait until at least the next afternoon for his story to be convincing. When it would finally be time to bring Will back to conscious awareness, Hannibal would tell some lie about how Will lost time and seemingly got himself into trouble. Hannibal would tell Will he didn’t know what happened, only that he showed up to Hannibal’s door, beaten, and Hannibal began tending to him.

All Hannibal hoped for was that the wall between the two states of Will was thick and solid enough that none of what happened that night would influence his normal, conscious state. It was difficult to imagine what damage it could do if Will remembered any of it, or if it at the very least had an influence on him. Having a whole part of oneself's value be predicated on beauty, only to have it taken away by the same creature who bestowed that upon him.

Yet the more Hannibal thought about it, the more he realized this version of Will was beautiful, too. Will *was* immutably beautiful; Hannibal had to acknowledge that now. None of the perfumes could compare to Will's natural scent, and none of the clothing and makeup could compare to the way Will's natural body, before Hannibal began his worship and still now.

Will's natural body, of course, included the way his body naturally changed in response to Hannibal's brutality. Indeed, Will was still beautiful not in spite of what Hannibal had done to him, but *because* of it. Typhoid and swans all came from the same source, and it was all called good, because He created it. In a similar way, gentility and cruelty all came from the same hand, and so it was all beautiful.

Because that hand acted as the agent of Hannibal's love for Will, that complex, paradoxical, divine love. This was all part of the process of falling in love with Will, a process that would never end.

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